UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General attends Ibero-American Summit in Argentina; meets with Haitian President and United States Vice President in Haiti.

* ACC decides to establish four inter-agency groups to assist in follow-up to major United Nations conferences, UNDP Administrator announces.

* Cease-fire continues to hold in Bosnia and Herzegovina despite small-scale fighting around north-western confrontation line.

* UNHCR warns institution of asylum is under threat worldwide; calls for new initiatives to protect refugees during flight and exile abroad.

* General Assembly seeks closer ties between United Nations and Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation.

* Secretary-General extends appointment of Representative in Cambodia for another six months.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today attended the fifth Summit Conference of Ibero-American Heads of State and Government at San Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina. In his statement to the Conference, he said regional associations were essential to international democratization. They enabled new actors to emerge on the world stage, kept open channels of communication and linked all levels of international affairs. He also stressed the importance of democracy in education for development.

The Secretary-General was in Haiti over the weekend. After arriving in Port-au-Prince on Saturday, he visited the headquarters of the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH) and was briefed by Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi on the Mission's work. He later met with President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and discussed, among other things, the forthcoming presidential elections, the role of United Nations agencies in Haiti and the need for continuing economic assistance from the international community.

(more)

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On Sunday, the Secretary-General attended a ceremony commemorating the first anniversary of President Aristide's return to Haiti. Before leaving the country, he met with United States Vice President Al Gore. They discussed the question of a transitional period after UNMIH leaves Haiti and the financial crisis of the United Nations.

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The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) has agreed on the need to establish four inter-agency groups to assist in the follow-up to recent major United Nations conferences, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), James Gustave Speth, said today. He told correspondents at Headquarters that those groups would focus on particular objectives emerging from the conferences. They would bring United Nations agencies and programmes together around common themes and provide coordinated assistance to individual countries.

The first inter-agency group would seek to organize a system to provide basic social services for all, particularly the poor, and would be chaired by the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), Mr. Speth continued. The second group would focus on creating income-generation opportunities for the poor and assist in attaining full employment and sustainable livelihoods. It would be chaired by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The third group would promote a broad enabling environment for the achievement of sustainable human development, he went on. It would deal with such issues as adjustment, debt, finance for development, access to technology and social integration, and be chaired by the World Bank. The fourth group would seek to launch a special initiative on the advancement and empowerment of women, as soon as the General Assembly had considered the Beijing Platform for Action.

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The Bosnian cease-fire continued to hold today despite small-scale fighting around the Sanski Most and Bosanska Otoka areas of the north-western confrontation line, according to a United Nations spokesman. However, the situation was expected to improve as the parties became more comfortable with their new positions. Some military activity was also reported in Sarajevo, but most firing incidents there were assessed to be "celebratory fire" -- people firing their weapons into the air.

Meanwhile, the Central Joint Commission consisting of military leaders of the Bosnian parties and the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) met again today in Sarajevo, the spokesman noted. It dealt with two critical

issues: delineation of the confrontation lines and monitoring of the cease-fire.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sadako Ogata, today warned that the institution of asylum was under threat worldwide. Addressing the annual meeting of the UNHCR's 50-member Executive Committee, she called for new initiatives aimed at prevention and protection in countries of origin, as well as during flight and exile abroad.

"Many countries are openly admitting their weariness with large numbers of refugees ... and are blatantly closing their borders," she said. "Others are more insidiously introducing laws and procedures which effectively deny admission to their territory."

She went on to say that the UNHCR's dual mandate to protect refugees and find lasting solutions to their problems was being severely tested by the global decline of asylum. She stressed the need for action to enable countries to receive refugees and initiatives to solve refugee problems and, where possible, to prevent them.

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The General Assembly today invited the Secretary-General to promote cooperation between the United Nations and the Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation. In a resolution adopted without a vote, it also requested specialized United Nations agencies and programmes to work with the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the Agency to promote such cooperation.

A representative of the Agency for Culture and Technical Cooperation said it had sent 25 missions to observe elections in various member countries. He added that the United Nations and the Agency could strengthen their cooperation in the area of electoral assistance.

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The Secretary-General has extended the appointment of Benny Widyono as his Representative in Cambodia for another six months. In a letter to the President of the Security Council dated 13 October, he said he was taking that action in response to the wish of the Cambodian Government. He noted that Mr. Widyono would continue to be assisted by one military leader in carrying out his mandate in accordance with the spirit and principles of the Paris Agreements.

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